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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PESHAWAR 000161

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: NWFP: CENTRAL SWAT KHANS HAVE LOST AUTHORITY, COMPLICATING
POST-CONFLICT GOVERNANCE

REF: A) PESHAWAR 158 B) LAHORE 153

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate
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REASON: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) Summary: Central Swat's prominent landowning "khan" families, who have long formed the backbone of Swat's political leadership, have seen their position seriously undermined by the rise of militancy in Swat and their flight from the district. Now, they are attempting to rebuild their positions in the district and create an indigenous anti-militant counter-force, against a backdrop of continuing violence and class resentment in central Swat. Their own dearth of resources, lack of government support for their plans, and internal rivalries will make the accomplishment of this task close to impossible. While the passing of the landlord class may be a positive development for Swat in the long run, it will likely create difficulties for Swat's government administration in the immediate wake of the conflict there. End Summary.

The Departure of the Khans

2. (C) Since before the time of the British, Swat's politics have been dominated by the khans, prominent landowning families from among the district's dominant Yusufzai Pashtuns who command the allegiance of the people of their localities. Even now, virtually all of Swat's National Assembly and Provincial Assembly members and nazims (elected leaders at the district, tehsil, and union council level) are members of these families. Swat's urbanization, land reform, and other economic and social changes have marginalized some of these families (the family of the Wali, the former ruler of Swat, now has little land and virtually no authority within the district), but in certain parts of the district, khans were until recently able to resist the tide and retain much of their power and influence. This was particularly the case in central Swat - especially around Matta.

Khans in Matta wielded disproportionate influence in the politics of Swat as a whole, dominating their own region and leading the actions of allied families in other parts of Swat and in neighboring districts.

3. (C) Over the past two years, this picture has changed dramatically. Targeted by militants, the khan families of

central Swat largely abandoned their homes in two waves - one in late 2007, as the militant pressure began to intensify and at the beginning of the first Pakistani military campaign in Swat, and one in mid-2008, as conditions worsened again in the wake of that campaign. Many of them moved to nearby Abbottabad, or further afield to Peshawar or Islamabad. In their absence, militants destroyed their homes, orchards, processing plants, and other symbols and elements of their economic power. Both by their flight and by the destruction of their property, the khans suffered considerable loss of face in Swat. The primary exception was Afzal Khan Lala, the most prominent member of one of the leading families of central Swat, whose refusal to leave his home even during the period of militant dominance of Swat and despite the deaths of many of his relatives have made him something of a folk hero among Swat Pashtuns.

Insecurity and Conditions for Militancy Still In Central Swat

¶4. (C) With the conclusion of the government's military campaign in Swat, the khans have begun to make plans to return. Those who have spoken to us are deterred, however, by the continuing insecurity in their home areas. Throughout central Swat, and especially in Matta and Kabal, continued militant activity and ongoing military operations have restricted access to the area for intending returnees (Ref A). While members of prominent families in Lower Swat and the Mingora area have been returning, Consulate contacts say that those of central Swat have generally made exploratory visits but then returned to their cities of exile.

¶5. (C) The returnees complain that while the army remains in place in central Swat, it lacks ties to Swat's people and therefore information; as a result, militants are able to move about unmolested and intimidate the population. (Note: Pakistani press on July 29 quoted an anonymous source within the

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NWFP police as admitting that the government now had virtually no informants left in the Swat population.) Several Consulate contacts found hope of an anti-militant trend in Swat from the series of revenge killings of suspected Swat militants over the past two weeks (at least ten have been reported). They have variously attributed these killings to the military and to the families of the militants themselves. Almost all of these killings, however, have taken place in the Mingora area and Lower Swat. In central Swat, the khans allege that militants are still the force that most intimidates the population.

¶6. (C) While the khans who have spoken to post claim to have the support of their traditional dependents in their home areas, they are likely aware that the grievances that originally drove militancy are still present. From the beginning of militancy in Swat, the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) in the district took advantage of the class struggle between khans and poor Swatis to fill its ranks with those who had felt oppressed by the khans. The TTP's excesses have diminished its attractiveness, but the arrival of thousands of impoverished farmers to devastated lands will recreate the discontented population that originally fed the militancy. Among certain populations, history is already being revised. As recently as July 30, Shahzad Gujar, a tribal elder and head of the "Gujar Qaumi Movement" (which purports to represent the Gujar tribesmen who make up much of the population of landless, non-Pashtun peasants living in central Swat but who joined the militants in disproportionately low numbers) told a panel of prominent Malakand politicians and tribal leaders and Pakistani academics that the taliban in Swat had been a positive force - militants' excesses late in their period of dominance, he said, had actually been brought on by criminals calling themselves taliban.

No Government Support for Khans

¶7. (C) This underlying resentment against the khans among central Swatis and the loss of face that the khans have suffered help to explain the intensity with which the major landowning

families in central Swat have pursued the government assistance in regaining their original positions in Swati society. This drive has included khans' requests for reimbursement of destroyed property and for public government recognition of their stance against the militants (neither of which has met a positive government response). The principal goal of the khans' lobbying, however, has been the acquiring of government sanction and assistance in setting up private armies. Already as the military operation in Swat was in late May (and before any returns were possible), Afzal Khan Lala in nationally televised interviews began calling on the government to arm the people of Swat against the militants. According to several Consulate contacts involved in the Swat Qaumi Jirga (a pressure group/quasi-government-in-exile formed of prominent Swatis), the Jirga was involved in equally intense backroom lobbying to the same end at both the provincial and federal levels.

18. (C) At first, the NWFP government appeared to buckle to the pressure, unofficially floating a plan to provide surplus police arms to local "village defense committees" in mid-June. By early July, however, criticism of the scheme by various stakeholders (including the Embassy) caused the NWFP government to publicly withdraw the offer of arms to such groups. The government instead proposed that they be given to a special supplemental police force for Swat, which would be more accountable to the provincial government and police (though it is unclear to the Embassy how exactly the special police would interact with other police in the district). The landowners complain that such forces, lacking the stiffening provided by accountability to local leadership (i.e., to the khans), will melt away if faced by renewed insurgency. They continue to lobby the government to either reverse this decision or to provide them with funds to help equip their own forces, but at present they do not have the means to present the kind of counterforce against the militants which several have told post is the sole prerequisite for their return.

Divisions Among the Khans

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19. (C) Longstanding divisions between the major landed families also continue to play a role in preventing Swat's political leadership from presenting a unified front against the militants. The major families of Yusufzai khans in Swat (as well as neighboring Buner and Shangla, and to a lesser extent Dir) have for centuries been divided between two rival groups, called "dallas." Prior to Swat's absorption into Pakistan, one group was aligned with and the other generally opposed to the Wali. After absorption, most members of the pro-Wali group aligned with the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and most members of the opposition aligned with the Awami National Party (ANP). The two groups have been and continue to follow the leads of the two principal families of the Matta tehsil of Central Swat, who are represented most prominently by Jamal Nasir (the nazim of Swat district) and Afzal Khan Lala respectively. On occasion, as in the 1970s when faced by the socialist Mazdoor Kissan movement, the two dallas have united to face a common threat. As militancy began to rise over the past few years, however, the two groups pursued different strategies.

10. (C) By mid-2007, when militants began to target Swat's political leaders, the Musharraf-aligned PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid - primarily composed of the dalla led by Jamal Nasir's family) held most locally-elected offices in Swat not held by MMA (Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal - the religious party alliance which at that time governed the NWFP). The ANP (and therefore Afzal Khan Lala's dalla) held virtually no offices and therefore was not initially targeted. Under pressure and losing relatives to assassinations and kidnappings, Jamal Nasir's family went to Afzal Khan Lala in September 2007 and asked him to join them in forming a lashkar and repressing the militants; Afzal Khan consulted with his family and declined to do so. Members of both dallas point to this moment as the key missed opportunity in dealing with the militants; by the time the

militants began in earnest to target the ANP-linked families in mid-2008, the landowners as a class were no longer in a position to mount any resistance.

¶11. (C) Ironically, Afzal Khan Lala has become the most respected leader in Swat primarily because of the period of militant dominance that his initial reluctance to fight helped to create. The militants drove virtually all other major landlords and secular politicians out of Swat, while Afzal Khan courageously refused to leave his home. Among Jamal Nasir's dalla, this fact has engendered a mixture of envy and resentment. In Afzal Khan Lala's dalla, there is ambivalence about allowing old rivals to take advantage of Afzal Khan Lala's prominence to regain the status they had lost. Discussions among the landowners of both dallas continue, but there are few indications of concrete progress in forming a united front capable of presenting an alternative to the militants.

Comment: Khans' Influence Wanes, But Who Will Replace Them?

¶12. (C) In the wake of their flight from Swat and their impoverishment by militant actions, the once-powerful khans of central Swat have been reduced to government supplicants, unable to recreate the system they once dominated. To the government, they are expendable - particularly now that the local offices of nazim, which the khans dominated, will be stripped of power by the repeal of the local government ordinance (Ref B). The khans were in many ways as important in fueling militancy as they could have been in crushing it, and the Embassy assesses that government equipping of unaccountable private armies would have created greater problems than it would have solved. In the long run, the diminution of their power should diminish the class struggle that has fed the militancy in Swat. However, the khans' argument that they are the natural anti-militant leaders appears to be true in the absence of any evidence of more grassroots anti-militant activity. Their absence will strip Swat of needed intermediaries for the non-Swati bureaucrats who are now setting up to rebuild the district and bring it firmly under the government writ.

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